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Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 15961

EXDIS

GENEVA FOR AMBASSADOR TOON

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, SHUM, PEPR, UR
SUBJECT: THE GINZBURG AND SHCHARANSKIY TRIALS: WHY TOGETHER AND WHY NOW?

1. THE SOVIET DECISION TO TRY BOTH GINZBURG AND SHCHARANSKIY AT THE SAME TIME AND TO SCHEDULE THE TRIALS TO BEGIN JUST TWO DAYS BEFORE THE OPENING OF ANOTHER ROUND OF HIGH-LEVEL SALT NEGOTIATIONS IN GENEVA STRIKES US AS BOTH HIGHLY UNUSUAL AND CAREFULLY CONSIDERED. FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE, THE CONSIDERATIONS THAT WENT INTO THE DECISION PROBABLY INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING:

-- THE SOVIET LEADERS PROBABLY DECIDED THAT SIMULTANEOUS TRIALS WOULD CAUSE LESS DAMAGE TO THEIR INTERNATIONAL IMAGE THAN CONSECUTIVE TRIALS. THEY CALCULATED -- AND FROM WHAT WE CAN SEE OF WESTERN PRESS REPORTS THUS FAR APPARENTLY CORRECTLY -- THAT THE GREAT BULK OF WESTERN ATTENTION WOULD GO TO THE SHCHARANSKIY TRIAL IF IT OCCURRED AT THE SAME TIME

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AS THAT OF GINZBURG, WHEREAS THE LATTER'S TRIAL, LIKE THAT OF ORLOV BEFORE HIM, WOULD GARNER SIGNIFICANT WESTERN ATTENTION IF IT OCCURRED ALONE.

-- THEY PROBABLY DO NOT EXPECT AGREEMENT ON SALT IN THE NEAR FUTURE. IF THAT IS THEIR JUDGMENT, SINCE THEY HAVE COMMITTED THEMSELVES TO HOLDING THE

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TRIALS, THIS MAY SEEM A "GOOD" TIME TO GET THEM
OUT OF THE WAY.

-- WITH LITTLE HOPE FOR AN EARLY SALT AGREEMENT
OR FOR CHANGES IN U.S. TRADE LEGISLATION AND
WITH THE CURRENT LOW STATE OF BILATERAL RELATIONS,
THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP MAY HAVE DECIDED THAT IT
HAS LITTLE AT PRESENT TO GAIN BY TREATING DISSI-
DENTS CAREFULLY, AND LITTLE TO LOSE BY TREATING
THEM HARSHLY.

-- BY CHOOSING TO BEGIN THE TRIALS TWO DAYS BEFORE
THE GENEVA TALKS, THE LEADERSHIP LEAVES A CLEAR
IMPRESSION THAT IT WILL NOT ACCEPT ANY LINKAGE
BETWEEN SALT AND HOW IT HANDLES INTERNAL DISSIDENCE
AND THAT IT WILL NOT BE INTERRED BY WESTERN
PRESSURE FROM DEALING WITH DISSIDENTS AS IT SEES
FIT.

-- FINALLY, IF THE REGIME HAS ANY SERIOUS HOPE
OF PARTICIPATING IN A SWAP FOR ITS TWO ARRESTED
U.N. EMPLOYEES WHICH WOULD INCLUDE SHCHARANSKIY,
FOR BOTH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN PROPAGANDA PURPOSES
IT NO DOUBT WOULD PREFER THAT HE BE CONVICTED
OF ESPIONAGE BEFORE THE SWAP. A TRIAL AND CON-
VICTION NOW WOULD BE DESIRABLE, AGAIN FOR PROPA-
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GANDA PURPOSES, IF IT WOULD MAKE POSSIBLE AN
EXCHANGE OF SHCHARANSKIY, THE CONVICTED "TRAITOR",
FOR TWO SOVIET U.N. EMPLOYEES, NOT YET BROUGHT TO
TRIAL.

2. IT IS DIFFICULT FOR US TO JUDGE AT THIS POINT
WHERE THE SOVIETS THINK THIS POLICY WILL LEAD,
SINCE WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY HAVE IN MIND FOR
SHCHARANSKIY AND GINZBURG, OR WHETHER THEY WILL
BE AMENABLE TO ARRANGING AN EXCHANGE SHORTLY
AFTER THE TRIALS. WE FIND PARTICULARLY DISTURBING,
HOWEVER, THE DELIBERATELY CALLOUS AND CONTEMPTUOUS
ATTITUDE REFLECTED BY THE TIMING OF THESE TRIALS.
IT IS AS IF THE LEADERSHIP BELIEVES THAT IF IT
DEMONSTRATES ONCE AND FOR ALL ITS DISTASTE FOR U.S.
HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY AS APPLIED TO U.S.-SOVIET RELATIDNS
THAT POLICY WILL BE CHANGED. THIS SEEMS TO US
TO REFLECT ONCE AGAIN A SERIOUS FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND
BOTH THE U.S. DOMESTIC POLITICAL PROCESS AND THE
NEGATIVE EFFECT IN THE WEST OF THE CYNICAL,
MANIPULATIVE FACE THESE ACTIONS SHOW TO THE
WORLD. TOON

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